

Montana GEAR UP

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education / Montana University System



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Director's Message: by Sandy Merdinger

After a busy holiday season, it is back to a more traditional routine for many of us. First I want to thank those of you completing the annual GEAR UP survey for taking the time to do so when December was already filled with many activities. This is a valuable tool for receiving feedback from local communities so we can continually review our services and make the appropriate adjustments. Our independent evaluator reports that almost all schools have returned their surveys and analysis of the data will begin soon.

The achievement grants were reviewed last month and the notification of awards is going out. Congratulations to all of the students awarded an achievement grant! We are pleased that most students who applied were awarded an achievement grant. However, I do have a couple of concerns. The first is that only about one third of the juniors in the cohort applied for the grant. At this time we don't know if that is because they don't plan to attend college, they didn't qualify, didn't want to apply or weren't made aware of the opportunity to apply. We hope to find out more why the response was so low so we can address the issue(s). My other concern is that many of the students not qualifying for the achievement grant did not appear to be taking college prep curriculum. Once again we want to learn more about why this is the case.

If you haven't heard, Alan Pule, the GEAR UP liaison from St. Ignatius, is in Seattle for several weeks with his family as their baby daughter, Brynn, is undergoing treatment for cancer in her eye. Many of you met young Brynn at the fall conference in September. If you want more information or want to contact Alan, they have a website tracking their progress in Seattle. It is www.caringbridge.org/mt/brynnpule/index.htm. We wish the Pules the best in this difficult time for them.

I look forward to seeing many of you in the coming year. Certainly I will see the liaisons at the February 10 meeting in Helena. Plus I hope to see others on school visits and at other meetings and conferences. However, don't feel you have to wait for a visit if you have something on your mind. Feel free to contact me at 406-444-0317 or smerdinger@oche.montana.edu. To all of you, I wish you a happy and healthy 2004!

GEAR UP Summer Programs: a change in focus

After three years of decreasing enrollment in the GEAR UP summer camps, the decision has been made to change the focus and look more towards utilizing funds for a summer institute or academy. The need to serve the cohort is greater than continuing a program that has generated little interest in comparison to the amount of time and money people have

expended putting on summer camps. It has been noted again and again that travel is the number one thing that has prevented students from attending some summer camps, and running a close second to that is the fact that our students are simply getting older and have different needs. Therefore we hope to receive proposals to put on three regional summer institutes that will give cohort students the opportunity to get a taste of what college life is all about. The academy curriculums will be similar across the state, and will (1) provide stimulating learning opportunities for students, (2) develop and promote career and educational aspirations, and (3) help students develop early awareness about the need to plan for college both academically and financially. But hey, college certainly isn't all work and no fun right? A true taste of campus life includes social and recreational activities as well.

If you haven't received an RFP by January 26th, and are interested in applying, please contact Peter Butler at (406) 444-0848 or pbutler@oche.montana.edu

- January Reminders:**
- There is a mandatory Liaison meeting in Helena on February 10th from 9:00-4:00. There is a lot on the agenda including: a look at the new direction that GEAR UP is going with the summer program, a time to discuss the midterm reports, GEAR UP scholarships, and plan for the Fall 2004 conference. Lunch will be provided, and we look forward to seeing you!
 - The Mid-term progress and fiscal reports are due **January 31, 2004**. Forms are available on the GEAR UP website.
 - It's easier to keep track of matching funds and document it as you go rather than to try to think back at the end of the year. Contact Kelly Hert if you have any questions about match.
 - The Essay Contest questions and guidelines were mailed out the week of January 5th. Completed essays must be postmarked by March 1, 2004. Please send completed essays to: Sally Speer, MGSLP, Grants & Scholarship Coordinator P.O. Box 203101, Helena, MT, 59620-3101
 - There are 220 cohort students that we hope will be graduating this spring! How are you planning on giving them special recognition?
 - This newsletter is also available on the web! www.gearup.montana.edu

This year there were approximately 650 cohort students who

2003-2004 Achievement Grants Report

were eligible to apply for \$1000 Achievement Grants. The Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program (MGSLP) received 217 applications, representing 17 out of 21 GEAR UP schools. Out of the 217 that did apply, 185 grants were awarded. That's 85%! Award letters were sent to students the week of January 5th. Awards will be held in a savings account until the student is ready to put their funds to use for further education beyond high school. We hope to hear success stories from the field, and how these awards help our students as they pursue higher education!

How do students retrieve their grant money???

Do you have seniors that are Achievement Grant or Essay Contest award winners?

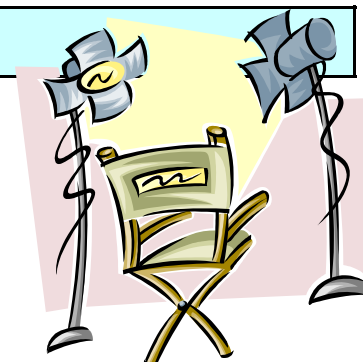
For seniors who were first place winners in the GEAR UP Essay Contest or recipients of a GEAR UP Achievement Grant, now is the time to submit the required forms to request a disbursement of funds from the college savings account.

Information, and forms about retrieving these funds is available on the GEAR UP web site at: <http://gearup.montana.edu/> under the "Grant Scholarship and Resource Information" heading there is a link to "Request for disbursement of funds form/College Savings Account" The form is the same for an Essay Contest award or an Achievement Grant, and if a student is a recipient of both, they can use one form to request both. The form needs to be completed by the student and submitted six months prior to the date the student intends to enter an eligible postsecondary institution. The student needs to include information on the college they will be attending, as the funds will be sent directly to the financial aid office at the institution.

If you have further questions regarding disbursement of funds from the College Savings Account, please contact Sally Speer at (406) 444-0638 or sspeer@mgslp.state.mt.us

The GEAR UP Spotlight: Bloomfield

Way out on the eastern border of Montana there is a great little school in Bloomfield. Bloomfield is a K-8 school whose official enrollment this year is 7. Graduates go to Richey High School approximately 30 minutes south near Wibaux. One of our cohort students, Julia Lindquist, is taking an AP class at Dawson Community College this semester. Her class is Studio Art Watercoloring and will meet for 3 hours every Wednesday evening at the college campus. Students also have finished a computer simulation with "Truelife". Several other Bloomfield cohort students are planning on attending campus days at MSU Bozeman on January 30th.



Save the dates! Upcoming Professional Development:

- **Montana's Title I Conference/High Priority Schools Institute.** February 23-25, 2004 Heritage Inn, Great Falls, MT
This Conference will provide information on the up-to-date regulations for Title I recipients, and include information for elementary as well as secondary schools. Registration is limited to the first 400 applicants, and information is available online: <http://btc.montana.edu/outreach/title/>
- **Montana Indian Education Association Annual Conference.** April 1-4, 2004 Holiday Inn-Parkside, Missoula, MT.
The MIEA Conference will be a great opportunity to learn, share your successes, and network with others who are working to define the educational future of American Indian people. The Montana Office of Public Instruction will host speakers and a "dropout prevention strand" of workshops throughout the conference, and will again select five students (grades 9-12) to receive a \$100.00 scholarship each for their presentation to conference participants on the theme, "Nurturing American Indian Leadership Into The Future." We hope you will encourage your students to participate in this activity. For Registration information please visit: www.mtica.org or contact Patty LaPlant at 406-728-5615 or apaki@mtwi.net, Carol Juneau at 406-338-5689 or csjuneau@3rivers.net, OR Thomas Brown at 406-768-3524.
- **Families and Learning Conference.** April 14-16, 2004 West Coast Colonial Hotel, Helena, MT
The 2004 Families & Learning Conference is geared for learning opportunities and professional development experiences for all parents and professionals involved in school/family/community partnerships and family literacy programs across Montana. The conference goals are:
 - To share new and proven strategies for working with at-risk families in the areas of school- and center-based parent involvement, family literacy, and early childhood education.
 - To broaden the understanding of research-based principles for the literacy education of children and adults.
 - To offer training to improve classroom and home-based instructional staff.
 - To offer workshops and training in important support functions such as fundraising, collaboration, volunteer or client recruitment/retention, data collection, and evaluation planning.
 Earlybird registration is \$100 and more information is available at: <http://www.montanapirc.org/>
- **Montana Association of Gifted and Talented Education 24th Annual Spring Conference: "Guiding Today's Explorers"** April 22-24, 2004 Best Western Great Northern, Helena, MT
The Montana AGATE spring conference focuses on differentiated instruction strategies that can be utilized in every classroom. Hear from a field of experts about current best practice methods on Thursday. On Friday, choose curricular areas to gain practical strategies that teachers are using today to improve student learning. Saturday, discuss the social and emotional needs of high ability learners. Registration for this conference is \$155 and includes the \$25 AGATE membership dues. Please contact Kathleen Dent at kathleendent@yahoo.com for more information and to receive a registration brochure.
- **Montana GEAR UP School Counseling Institute.** May 6-7, 2004 Holiday Inn, Bozeman, MT
Last year, the Montana School Counselor Association held a conference that introduced members to the school counseling program model used by the American School Counselor Association. This year MSCA will provide its members with training workshops that focus on the skills and strategies necessary for the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program. Montana GEAR UP is sponsoring the institute: School Counseling Programs: Making a Difference - An Institute for Skills and Strategies. The Institute will be held on May 6 and 7 in Bozeman at the Holiday Inn. Please mark your calendars NOW to attend this important event. Registration information is forthcoming.
- **PLATO Training Days:** There are approximately 6 prepaid PLATO training days left, and they are available on a first come, first serve basis by contacting Dave McMullen at (877) 517-5286 or by email at dmcullen@plato.com.

Montana & National Items of Interest:

New Montana NCLB Report Card Website:

The No Child Left Behind Act requires all school districts and the Office of Public Instruction to provide a public "Report Card" detailing how Montana schools and districts are meeting the current requirements of the new law. OPI has constructed a new website that will meet this NCLB requirement at both the state and local levels. Local districts can refer public requests for NCLB Report Card information to the new OPI website. Local districts are not required to develop their own NCLB Report Cards.

During the week of Jan. 5, districts will be emailed a "secure website" to preview the new Report Card and the information pertaining to their schools. After the information has been reviewed, the Report Card will be released to the public the week of Jan. 19.

The contents of the Report Card will include for schools, districts and the state:

- § Report Card Overview
- § Adequate Yearly Progress Status
- § Reading and Math Assessment Scores by subgroup
- § Graduation, enrollment, and/or attendance rates
- § Status of highly qualified teachers

A Free Drug-Prevention Guide

"Anti-Drug Education with The New York Times: Focus on Marijuana," is a guide designed to help teens recognize the risks of marijuana use and develop skills to resist using illicit drugs. The guide features worksheets, appendices and additional resources. Educators may use *The New York Times* as a source of texts and activities to reinforce important anti-drug messages and skills. The guide also uses lessons designed to reinforce objectives outlined by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). To download your copy of this guide, visit www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/NIE/focusonmarijuana.

New GRANTS.GOV Website

HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson unveiled a new comprehensive web site that will contain information about finding and applying for all federal grant programs. The site is intended to make it easier for organizations to apply for grants from 26 federal agencies. Access the site at www.grants.gov.

Do you know some one that would like to be added to the Newsletter distribution list? Please let us know!

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Montana GEAR UP website
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Montana Guaranteed Student Loan website:
<http://www.mgslp.state.mt.us/>

National GEAR UP website:
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/gearup/index.html>